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... and these are the birds, that live in the house that Jack built!

'Jack' being that nationally declining species, the Willow Tit, which unlike other tits excavates its own 'house' or nest cavity out of decaying timber. Fieldwork over the last few years is beginning to show that Willow Tits are under great pressure from 'these' more dominant Great Tits and Blue Tits in establishing nesting sites. This may be seen as a main cause for the decline of the species when viewed alongside habitat change over the years. This hypothesis will be discussed in the context of a Project that has looked at the Lanarkshire Willow Tit population since 1995, gradually gathering behavioural evidence from the remaining breeding areas through observations of the birds themselves.

Background

According to Walter Stewart, writing in the 1928 *Scottish Naturalist*, Lanarkshire was one of the best areas in Scotland for Willow Tits. He refers to the Clyde tributaries and smaller burns where *'damp, waterlogged soil.....produces rank, dense undergrowth'* and quotes the Rotten Calder glen, near East Kilbride, as holding *'a score of pairs'*. In the fifties, it was still fairly common to see parties of the species in suitable habitat, but it is only in the mid-seventies, according to CBC data, that a decline began to be noticeable. Since then, the range of Willow Tits in Scotland has contracted, matching the reducing numbers. Lanarkshire is now the northern limit for the species, with some in Ayrshire and the main stronghold in Galloway. Distribution is weak and patchy throughout Britain and it is now difficult for CBC and BBS surveys to chart the decrease because numbers are too low to figure adequately in calculations.

Willow Tit *Jimmy Maxwell*

It would certainly be tempting to lay the blame for this situation on lack of suitable conditions and habitat, as we have with many farmland species that are in similar difficulties. We know that Willow Tits require wet surroundings, be it riverside, marsh scrub or boggy woodland, with a good supply of decaying wood for their excavations. There is also no doubt that years ago it was quite acceptable to 'clean up' marshy areas for building, other developments and for more productive farming. Later, the proliferation of parklands as areas for public recreation would take a similar toll of such habitats. But when one sets about surveying the Lanarkshire countryside, it is quite amazing still to find a healthy amount of ideal habitat among the numerous and varied water catchments that are in the County. Deep marshy river valleys with ample decaying stumps, areas of tangled willow scrub with scattered hawthorn, riverside edges with mature alders and birches – and almost no Willow Tits present! There has to be some other contributing factor to cause such a decline.

There have also been gradual changes affecting Great Tits and Blue Tits in our lifetime. There was a time when houses and other buildings were less well maintained than they are now – materials were less weather-resistant and many properties were in poor repair or derelict. These offered plenty of nesting opportunities for the above species, as did factories, vacant lots, etc., and it was quite common to see Blue Tits going back and forward feeding their young in some crack in the woodwork or wall cavity. When houses gradually improved over the years and derelict properties were bulldozed, many of these birds may have been progressively forced into the surrounding countryside and into direct competition with the existing population for tree-based nesting cavities.

For Coal Tits, this increasing competition for natural sites from the more dominant Blue and Great Tits might have been a problem, but this species is noted for its adaptability and would always be able to nest even in ground cavities or among tree roots, etc. For Willow Tits, which always nested away from habitation and excavated their own stump cavities – there wouldn't seem to be any obvious difficulty concerning site-competition from these invading Blue Tits and Great Tits. But, as we shall see in the following evidence, the reduction in wet habitat over a lengthy period together with the unwanted attentions of these more dominant species was to prove just too much to allow Willow Tits to maintain their breeding success and population viability. For Great Tits and Blue Tits 'the house that Jack built' is just all too tempting!

Field study – observation and results

The main development that has taken place in the aforementioned Willow Tit Project over the last few years is of a specially-designed nest-box for the species. Basically, it is a bark covered plastic tube with an internal nest chamber filled to the entrance-hole with fine shavings. Wired on to a tree about shoulder height, it looks like a bark covered stump with a tempting bit of decay,

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

which will attract investigative pecking. It satisfies various criteria, being light to carry, cheap to make, waterproof, fairly long lasting and virtually invisible when placed in vandal-prone areas. As the Project is about studying adult behaviour and the natal dispersal of young birds, a colour ringing scheme is in operation and this design of nest-box facilitated the process by being easily accessed. A total of 135 boxes have now been placed in all Lanarkshire areas where previous breeding or sightings were recorded. The prime function of these boxes is to allow monitoring of Willow Tit presence and movement. If any birds are present in an area, they will readily find the boxes and excavate them.

From early on in the project, it became apparent from observation during the breeding season that any excavation by Willow Tits was causing great interest among Blue and Great Tits. At first, of course, in March there are prospecting, trial borings in several stumps (or boxes), possibly as much to do with pair bonding as site establishment. But during April, the excavation is more concentrated on one site, with both birds actively engaged in the work. At first the hole is dug out, a natural hole being slightly oval (vertically) and 3 cm across. The debris falls underneath the site at first, but as the excavation proceeds to form a chamber in a downward direction, the birds turn and fly out with the shavings and carry them progressively further away, eventually up to around 20 m. Four visits are possible per minute, with one bird excavating and the other hopping around waiting a turn. A fair amount of the diagnostic 'tschaying' call accompanies this action and it is, all in all, a very busy scene, which can go on for several days. Occasionally a pair will work simultaneously on two stumps in the same area.

It is hardly surprising then, that in a piece of woodland where numerous Great Tits and Blue Tits are prospecting and competing for suitably snug nesting holes, interest begins to centre on this architect-designed 'house' in the making. It is very common to see a pair of Blue Tits hanging around as the excavation gets seriously deep (Willow Tit cavities, on average, are 16cm in depth from the entrance hole). Due to constraints in watching time and daylight availability etc., observations have to stop and resume the next day. In many cases, the Willow Tits have by then disappeared and the Blue Tits taken over – or occasionally, aggression between the two species is witnessed. This happened at Jock's Gill, a tributary of the Clyde, where a pair had bred successfully the previous year. When the nest-box cavity was completed, the male Willow Tit was chased all round the vicinity by the Blue Tits, giving voice to a whole variety of distress calls. The pair left the area completely and has not returned last year or this.

In the breeding season 2000, one such 'commandeered' site was approached by the watcher. The Blue Tit pair, on top of the Hawthorn which held the nest-box, were relaxing after their successful take-over but reacted immediately to a bit of whistled Willow Tit song (*'siu siu'*) from the observer, by hopping down closer to the box. At each whistle, they dropped down closer, until on a final whistle, one entered the box to peck a few shavings out – quite obviously reacting in a proprietorial way to what they perceived as a further Willow Tit presence. It may well be that in many cases the Willow Tits give up excavation merely due to the presence of the dominant tits but, after conceding the site, excavation starts elsewhere almost immediately. Although the Willow Tit has a neck muscle structure designed for tough excavation, this work must be physically demanding, especially for the female who will eventually make the actual nest herself, produce the eggs and then attend to the incubation.

To quote one complete sequence of events in Strathclyde Country Park, Motherwell, in 1995: a pair of Willow Tits (female ringed) worked their way through several nest-boxes as described, with the usual Blue Tit interference. Contact was then lost between mid-April and 19 May, at which latter point a nest with 9 chilled eggs was found in a box out on the loch island in deep snow. Our pair had managed to get to this stage before having to desert in the severe weather. Towards the end of May, the birds started excavating their last box (by this time, five pairs of Blue Tits were either incubating eggs or feeding young in the previously 'acquired' nest-boxes in the area). By now, energy levels must have been getting low for the female Willow Tit – she gave up the excavation at only 3 cm under the nest-hole height and built the nest. She laid, incubated and the pair fed the young, which were duly ringed on 15 June. On the 18th, just before the young were due to fledge, the nest was predated! This was no surprise, as the young were fully exposed to the attentions of Black-billed Magpie, squirrel, weasel or whatever!

These birds, now the only pair left in the area, managed to nest successfully in the following year (1996) with the help of duplicate tit boxes (normal type) placed fairly near each of the specialised boxes to distract the more dominant tits (an idea from Chris Mead, BTO) Unfortunately, the female disappeared in the next winter and the male went on singing, but without mating in 1997. No Willow Tits have since been seen in Strathclyde Park.

Apart from the aforementioned series of Blue Tit take-overs (5 in the 1995 season when a single pair of Willow Tits was involved), 18 other individual Blue Tit take-overs and 2 by Great Tits have been witnessed. It is, of course, easy to monitor the known nest-box locations for this dominant activity, but 4 of these take-overs were seen at natural stump sites. Considering the difficulty in actually finding these, we can only guess at the overall number of occurrences in the latter! It was interesting that at Eastmuir Plantation, a peat-bog site with abundant decaying timber, the consecutive seasons 1998-9 each saw one of these natural take-overs occurring only 50 m apart in two different stumps. It is probable that it was the same Blue Tit pair that dominated the Willow Tits in both years. This evidence, acquired through many hours watching, gives some idea of the continuing pressure that Willow Tits have to endure. Multiply this backwards over the last forty or so years and we can begin to appreciate how, together with occasional patches of really severe weather, a breeding population can be steadily eroded down towards unsustainability. Were it not for the growing provision of garden nest-boxes easing the situation for the Willow Tit by diverting its competitors slightly, matters could be much worse.

The Lanarkshire picture does not include Marsh Tits in the dominance equation, for the obvious reason that they hardly appear in the County. However, it is significant that at the Hirsel estate in the Borders, where both Willow Tits and Marsh Tits bred until a few years ago, it is the Willow Tits that have disappeared. The differing amounts of nest-site preparation are probably the answer. They are hardly compatible – the Marsh Tit selecting a natural crevice, possibly low down on an elder and nest building without a great deal of publicity, the Willow Tit exactly the opposite, as we have already seen.

Willow Tit Nest Box *Jimmy Maxwell*

Current position and Conclusion

The Project continues with colour-ringing, observing and surveying into 2001 in the main breeding area between Newmains, Wishaw and Coltness. The colour-ringing especially has proved an indispensable tool – we now know for example that in one area a male breeding in the last 4 years has had a different mate in each season! Last year, 47 young were ringed from 6 pairs, 2 of which used the nest-boxes. In that season, another attempt at using duplicate boxes was tried in Coltness Woods. A Willow Tit pair was carrying out some tentative borings with a pair of Great Tits in attendance nearby. Two specialised nest boxes were put about 20 m apart, on either side of a dense thicket. The Willow Tits immediately excavated one, which was soon taken over by the Great Tits – the Willow Tit pair then excavated the second box and both species nested successfully. Two breeding areas holding nest-boxes have now been fully converted in this way into "doubles" as an ongoing experiment for this season.

The young from last year have all dispersed away from their natal areas, as is their custom. Some have travelled only a kilometre, while others, like the youngster which turned up at Baron's Haugh Nature Reserve, have travelled over 6 km. It is interesting that 4 from a single brood dispersed all in quite different directions. Much dispersal information comes from winter feeders, to which Willow Tits are often attracted.

It is certainly encouraging when we see young birds spreading out from the breeding centres, and perhaps slightly hopeful, when we see them acquiring mates, that the species is holding its own. However, many of the broods are never traced and may be colonising areas which we have failed to survey or may be simply overlooked in our searches. As for the dominance hypothesis – we of course rejoice that our friends, the Great Tits and Blue Tits, have not yet joined the 'at risk' category themselves, but worry that the Willow Tit is possibly on its way out, simply because of its own unchangeable lifestyle. Time will tell – 'Jack' will probably continue to expertly build his attractive 'house', and 'these', the dominant majority, will go on living in it!

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to Hamilton RSPB for surveying help. Neil Darroch for continuing personal involvement. Matt Mitchell for great help in nest-box work. Iain Livingstone for vital BTO ringing work. North Lanarkshire Council for interest and support. SNH, BTO and B & Q For funding.

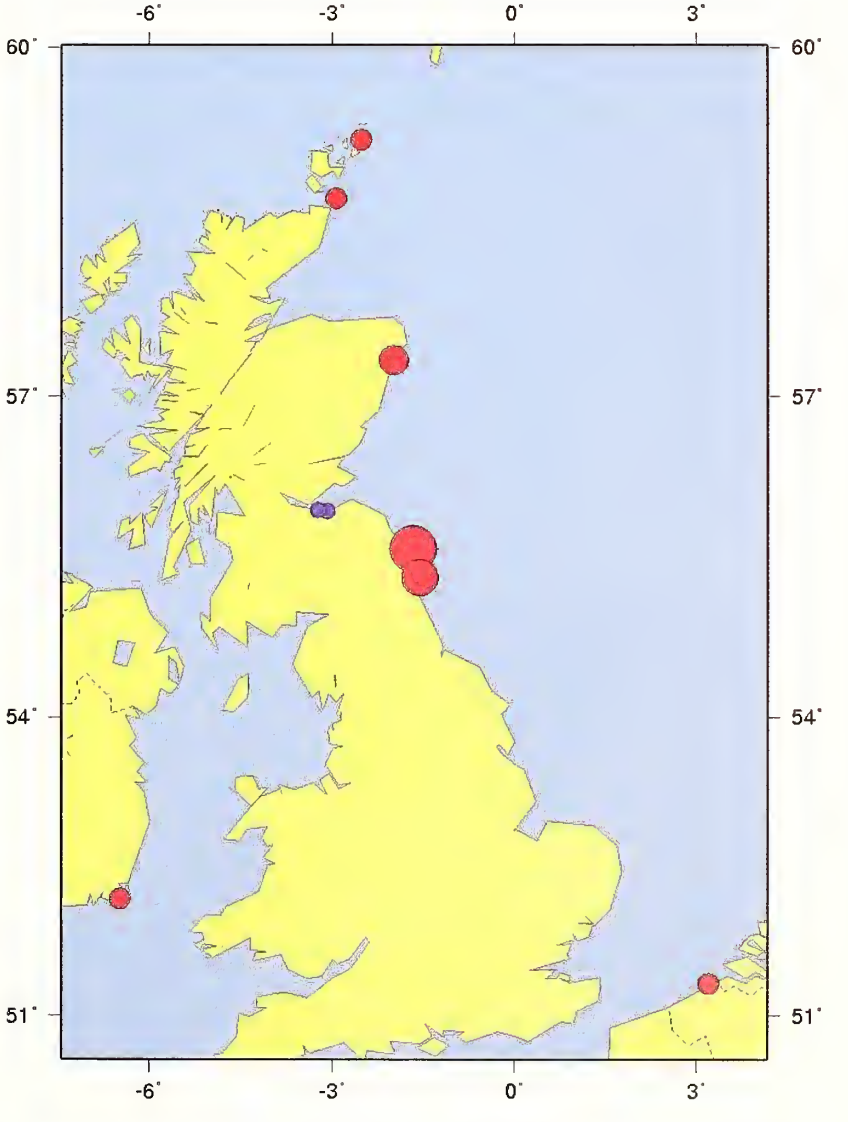
Jimmy Maxwell

Origin of Sandwich Terns observed in the Firth of Forth during the post-breeding period

Last year, many Sandwich Terns *Sterna sandvicensis*, probably several thousands, spent their post-breeding period in the Firth of Forth, before migrating to their wintering areas in Africa. The previous year (1999) saw a similar situation, registering a peak count in August of 3000 Sandwich Terns in Musselburgh (*Lothian Bird Report* 1999).

During September and October 2000 we attempted to shed some light on the origin of these visiting terns — since they are not common breeding birds in the Firth of Forth, it is a little mystery where these large numbers actually come from. Many of the terns we observed were ringed (approximately every fifth bird), and by reading the inscription of these rings (using a telescope) we could identify the origin of several birds. This method was carried out at coastal locations in the area of Edinburgh (in particular Cramond and Joppa) during upcoming tide, when the terns come close enough to the observer for reading the (metal) rings.

We succeeded in identifying the exact origin of 14 Sandwich Terns. The majority (8 birds) were ringed in England. The remaining 6 were ringed in Scotland (4), Belgium (1), and Eire (1). Figure 1 shows the ringing locations of these birds. Ten of these were ringed as nestlings in 2000, including those from Belgium, Eire, and one from Orkney. Among the adult birds there were two ringed as nestling in 1984 (on the Farne Islands) and 1985 (in Orkney) marking respectable ages of 16 and 15 years!



Ringing locations (red dots) of Sandwich Terns sighted in Joppa and Cramond (blue dots) in September-October 2000. The red dot areas are scaled according to the number of ringed birds in each location.

Johan Boss
Malvina Nissim

Breeding Common Eider at Montrose Basin

The breeding data published in the SOC *Scottish Bird Reports* (*SBR*) 1991-1998 shows that the Islands in the Forth (c.1000 nests), the Isle of May (c.1000 nests) and Horse Island, Ayr (c.400 nests) are the major Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* (hereafter 'Eider') breeding sites in Scotland. The Ythan estuary is reported to be '*a major colony*' (2000 pairs in 1970) but no data is available on the success rate of the colony. By repute it produces very few young birds due to predation.

In scanning through the *SBR* 1998, it was noticed that the entry for Eider held no data for Montrose Basin LNR. This was unexpected as it is well known by Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) staff that there have been regular surveys of breeding Eider, with up to 500 nests reported in recent years. In addition, Eiders are recognised as Nationally Important for breeding on the Basin and are included in the criteria for the SSSI, SPA (Special Protection Area) and Ramsar Site designations. Looking back over previous *SBRs* there were reports for Montrose Basin in 1993, 1995 and 1996 but no data for other years. This report tries to collate the known data about breeding Eider on Montrose Basin.

Surveys

Breeding bird surveys have been carried out at Montrose Basin for the BTO Nest Record Scheme for at least 5 years. This work on Eider breeding has been carried out by the Ranger, volunteers and by young scientists, sponsored by the Nuffield Science Bursary scheme, over the period of mid May to the end of July each year.

The survey area covered the region between the high water mark and the agricultural field boundaries that border the west end of Montrose Basin.

Results

The sources of data for this report are the *Angus & Dundee Bird Report* which contained data for 1986, 87, 88 & 95 and the BTO, to whom the survey cards had been sent for analysis. In addition, Surveyors' reports and Ranger's notes were checked where possible.

The data collected were generally in terms of the number of nests found and their individual fate (successful, predated, deserted etc.). The data is shown in Table 1.

Unfortunately, while some attempt was made to use the same methodology each time, reporting has varied considerably, which makes the data difficult to interpret. Therefore, the raw data will be presented and some general conclusions will be drawn rather than try to apply any rigorous statistics.

In addition, the monthly WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey) counts over the period 1985-2000 are included to show the observed population changes (Table 2).

Table 1: Number and fate of nests of Common Eider at Montrose Basin 1986 - 2000

	Total Nests	% Predated	% Deserted	% Unknown	% Successful	Data Source
1986	over 150					*ADBR*
1987	up to 200					*ADBR*
1988	120				50.0%	*ADBR*
1991	172					
1995a	103	17.5%	10.7%	5.8%	66.0%	*
1995b	300				47.0%	**
1995c	400+	36.0%	14.0%		50.0%	*ADBR*
1996	203	21.2%	8.4%	0.0%	70.4%	*
1997	500	37.2%	5.0%	13.2%	44.6%	*
1998					50.0%	*
1999	281	6.4%	6.0%	11.0%	76.5%	*
2000	386	20.7%	24.1%	7.0%	48.19%	Surveyor
Totals 1995-2000	1473	n=345 23.4%	n=163 11.1%	n=130 8.8%	n=835 56.7%	

Notes:
ADBR - Angus & Dundee Bird Report
* - BTO data
** - Ranger's notes
- Estimate by surveyor

Table 2: WeBS High Tide counts for Common Eider at Montrose Basin 1985 - 2000

WeBS - High Tide counts

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1985												1000-1500
1986	5	1840	840	1080			320	240	1375	2115	1800	1900
1987	1800	2772	1800	2100		1500	1000	820	2230	2200	2050	1650
1989											2960	
1993*	1000	1200	1350		600	900		500	1400	1000	1500	800
1994*		1200		1100	1050	600	550	950	1100	2100	1400	1400
1995					1716					2100		
1996	1940						1740		2100			2077
1997	1810		1630			1400		1720	2030	1650	2163	
1998	1770		1220	1601	1810	1500	1200	669	1727	1455	1314	1962
1999	2180	719	1876	1249	3365	1923	1443	1132	759	1868	2214	698
2000	1387	1512	1121	1239	1568		1298	1283	2500	1700	2363	1126

* Estimated from graphs in Angus & Dundee Bird Report

Discussion

The nest data for 1998 are missing because of problems in the execution of the survey that cast some doubt on the accuracy of the data. There is some discrepancy over the published data from different sources for 1995 for which there is currently no explanation.

The data show that between 100 and 500 nests were surveyed at the west end of the Reserve each year and overall were 56.7% successful. This is in line with previous survey data for Scotland of 61.7% (range 56.1-70.2%) (*BWP*). The level of predation is generally in the range 21-38% and deserted nests in the range 5-25%.

One surveyor is certain that there is always about 500 nests but they have not all been found in some years. Up to now, the survey has been restricted to one area on the Reserve and another surveyor is sure that there are more nests in other areas around Montrose Basin that have not been surveyed.

The WeBS data show that there have been some small changes in the population but no suggestion of a trend either upwards or downwards. This suggests a stable population that can sustain its numbers with the current breeding performance. The data do not show any rise in numbers in the period July to August as might be expected with the arrival of many hundreds of chicks. This is probably due to the movement of some adults with the young out of the Basin once the chicks have grown sufficiently to survive the rigours of the North Sea.

Conclusion

In comparison to the published data for other sites, Montrose Basin would seem to be one of the top four sites for breeding Eider in Scotland with, on average, 300 nests (range 100-500). The performance seems to be comparable to the other Scottish sites in terms of overall success but clearly some more detailed data would be required to perform a more accurate comparison.

I would be pleased to hear from anyone with additional data or views about these data.

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to the SWT's Ranger (Karen Spalding) and Conservation Manager Tayside (Rick Goater) for allowing access to the Breeding Survey records. Mike Raven (Nest Record Officer, BTO) responded quickly with the analysed Survey Data. Thanks also to the Nuffield Science Bursary for supporting the Surveys and to the young scientists from local schools and universities who carried out the work.

Glossary

SOC - Scottish Ornithologists Club
SBR - Scottish Bird Report
BTO - British Trust for Ornithology
SWT - Scottish Wildlife Trust
BWP - Birds of the Western Palearctic
WeBS - Wetland Bird Survey

Andy Wakelin

Female Common Eider *William S Paton*

Scottish Crossbill nest covered by snow

On 22 March 2000, a Crossbill nest was found amongst foliage on a lateral branch, 6 m up a 17 m tall Scots Pine tree at Abernethy Forest. On this date, the nest was being completed, and 2 eggs out of the clutch of 4 were laid by 24 March. Both birds were trapped for ringing and identified as Scottish Crossbills on bill measurements and from the sonograms of their tape-recorded calls (Summers, Jardine, Marquiss & Rae. *Ibis* in press).

There was a heavy fall of snow on 2 April and the branch containing the nest accumulated about 30 cm of snow (Fig. 1). It was assumed that the birds had deserted the nest. During 5 April, the site was re-visited and the female flew down below the branch which held the nest. The tree was climbed and the snow was cleared along the branch. The snow was not powdery so could be removed in large lumps. The nest was exposed and the 4 eggs were warm. Clearly, the incubating female had allowed the snow to accumulate over her during the snow-fall. This had formed a compact cover above her, allowing her to slip off and on the nest from below the layer of snow. The male Crossbill generally feeds its mate at the nest during incubation and it is not known how this was accomplished during the 3 days the nest was buried.

The eggs were estimated to have hatched on 8 April, and the first of 3 young fledged on 28 April. We don't know what would have happened to the nest if the snow had been allowed to melt naturally

Ron Summers
Chris Donald

Ron Summers

The nest during the heavy fall of snow. The arrow indicates the nest position.

Surveys of Slavonian Grebes in 2000

2000 was a year of mixed fortunes for Slavonian Grebes in Scotland. The numbers of pairs (31) and breeding lochs (15) continued to fall (see Figure 1), but those birds that did breed had their most successful season ever recorded in terms of the number of chicks reared per pair on territory (1.06). It is unclear why it was such a bumper year for chick production, but it may have been weather-related; it was a relatively warm and calm summer and this may have helped them, as Scottish birds are generally less successful than those on the Continent. This year, they matched the performance of their European brethren.

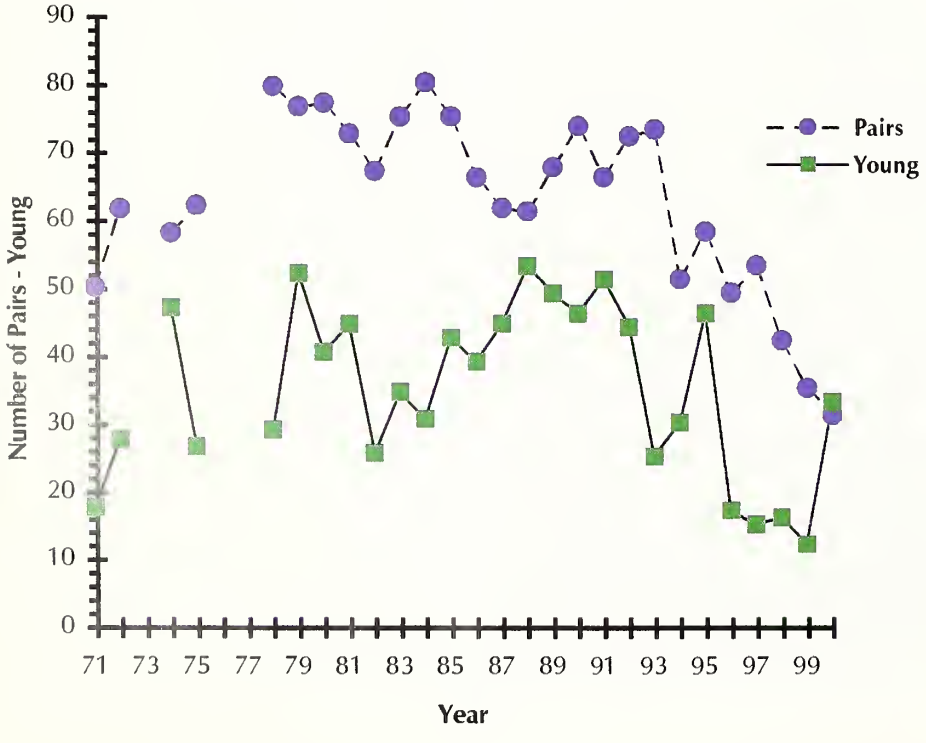
At Loch Ruthven, 14 pairs reared 22 young. Of all the sites where Slavonian Grebes occur, this is by far the most complex and difficult to count. During weekly visits by two observers, even in ideal conditions it was not always possible for one person to see all the birds present. The survey of the loch this year was the most intensive ever, and there is a suspicion that there may have been undercounting of young in some previous years. Fourteen pairs were present on both 15 and 26 May and there were also 3 single birds there on the latter date. Most pairs were on nests deep within the sedges by early June, when accurate counting would become more difficult without causing unjustifiable disturbance. By July, most young had hatched and numbers began to build. The loch was flat calm on 25 August and it is considered that the count of 22 young is definitive. There were also 33 adults present. This ties in reasonably well with 14 pairs plus three singles, although immigration from elsewhere by failed breeders cannot be discounted.

One pair elsewhere chose to nest at a site that is little more than a flooded field. It shows that Slavonian Grebes do not necessarily need natural lochs with extensive sedge beds to breed successfully. The nest was built in April in the middle of the open water. It was some 22 cm above the water level in the manner of a Flamingo's nest and there was not a scrap of vegetation anywhere near it! The birds were seen incubating from the start of May, so clearly laid exceptionally early for a Scottish Slavonian Grebe. The nest became quite celebrated and continued to be well watched by birdwatchers and locals alike from a distance. Early on 27 May, two young were seen. Unfortunately, that weekend (a Bank Holiday!) turned out to be exceedingly cold with incessant rain. Only one young was seen later on 27 May, and none on 28 and 29 May. The pair re-nested and on 26 July both parents were seen feeding a large chick in the small area of water now left. Both adults left soon after, and the chick is assumed to have fledged successfully.

In order to find out more about the predation pressure on Scottish Slavonian Grebes, two cameras were installed at one site in 2000. Meat, sardines or eggs were used as bait and the cameras automatically recorded what was there if an infra-red beam was broken. European Robins seemed to be particularly attracted to the baits but the only mammal 'captured' was an Otter. The RSPB is to carrying out further research into the role of predation in 2001.

This information taken from the Slavonian Grebe Newsletter 2000, compiled by Stuart Benn, Senior Conservation Officer for RSPB Scotland. Tel: 01463 715000. Email: stuart.benn@rspb.org.uk

Figure 1: Number of pairs of Slavonian Grebes and young in Scotland, 1971-1999. Dashed line = pairs; solid line = young reared.



Charles Frank

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Conservation News

This section is again unfortunately dominated by instances of raptor persecution. The late First Minister, Donald Dewar stated that the persecution of raptors in Scotland is 'a national disgrace'. This year has seen considerable media coverage of the problems facing our birds of prey. All SOC members are urged to sign the RSPB public petition to the First Minister (by 7 September) calling for improved wildlife legislation in Scotland.

Successful Prosecution of Gamekeeper

When Douglas Ross, a gamekeeper at Craigmill, Knockando estate, shot a fledgling Hen Harrier near the nest, he was clearly unaware that his actions were being videoed by RSPB investigators. They watched as he picked up the bird and the remains of his cartridge and walked away from the scene of the crime. This video evidence was central to a successful prosecution – a rare event in the world of wildlife crime, especially in Scotland where much of the action occurs on tracts of deserted, and often private, land.

Since the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) gained Royal Assent in November, this crime would have been punishable by imprisonment in England and Wales. Ross was given a £2000 fine and, perhaps unsurprisingly, has been allowed to keep his job, since this was, apparently, an isolated incident which is not going to happen again. One has to congratulate the RSPB investigators for having the prescience to set up cameras at a nest on the offchance that an isolated incident might occur.

The consultation period for the Scottish Executive's *The Nature of Scotland* policy statement ended on 29 May. We must hope that it will eventually lead to legislation that will at least match, preferably surpass, that of England and Wales in relation to wildlife crime, which continues to damage the population status of some Scottish birds. The prospect of arrest and custodial sentences may well deter potential criminals, although to be genuinely just the legislation must find a way to make landowners responsible for the actions they expect their employees to perform.

Only time will tell whether Foot-and-Mouth restrictions have allowed rogue landowners to purge their land of raptor species in relative security.

Gamekeepers and Raptors

Most birders would agree that the long-term conservation of birds in the UK countryside will depend on cooperation and mutual understanding between the main conservation agencies and those people who own and manage the land. Sadly, Scottish Gamekeepers, and presumably their employers, appear to have no intention of becoming part of any such symbiosis.

The Scottish Gamekeepers' Association ("founded by Gamekeepers for Gamekeepers") distributed a briefing note to all MSPs earlier this year, boldly entitled *The Raptor Problem*. The document starts off in similarly forthright manner:
'Gamekeepers have been managing the countryside for 200 years, and much of the present Scottish countryside is a result of their management. The combination of [shooting] income and wildlife management has created much of the present way of life in rural Scotland. Much of this is in danger of dying out as political correctness and protectionist interests take precedence over biodiversity. Anywhere there are gamekeepers or shooting interests there is an abundance of wildlife. Gamekeepers are the true conservationists.'

The rest of the document amounts to a declaration of outright hostility to raptors and the organisations that try to protect them, though it is the RSPB that suffers the most serious accusations. Raptors, we are told, put gamekeepers on the dole... the RSPB lies about the raptor problem... the RSPB has the audacity to keep records about individual gamekeepers that may be used to investigate wildlife crimes... the RSPB deliberately misleads the public about songbird declines... the RSPB diverts attention from the main problems... raptor population surveys cannot be trusted because they are carried out by people who have a vested interest in raptor protection... the main obstacle to gamekeepers is the law concerning protection of raptors... Scottish Natural Heritage is in the pocket of RSPB and only protects raptors for financial reasons. The briefing recommends, of course, that the blanket protection of raptors be relaxed.

Fortunately, not all MSPs believe everything they read, and some have had the foresight to pass the Briefing on to interested conservationists. This is an explosive development, as it blows away the façade of cooperation between some shooting interests and conservation organisations that has masked an undercurrent of persistent and widespread illegal activity. We are lucky that images such as the video evidence that convicted a gamekeeper from the Knockando estate for killing a Hen Harrier carry far more weight among the public and politicians than the lobbying of the SGA.

Red Kite Update

At least five Red Kites have been killed as a result of eating poisoned bait in the Highlands in the last 12 months. All the poisoning incidents were on or next to sporting estates, but enquiries by the Police and officials from the Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department (SERAD) have so far been inconclusive.

The poison used, carbofuran, is more toxic than strychnine; both the poisoned bait and the victim pose a risk to members of the public who come across them. It is particularly disheartening that the very reason the species became extinct in Scotland 120 years ago is still the main cause of death today. There are many estates and farmers who go out of their way to look after the kites, and they are being let down by a selfish minority.

Nevertheless, 2000 was the most successful year for kites since the reintroduction project started, 11 years ago. In North Scotland, 36 territorial pairs were located, 32 of which bred, all but two successfully. A record 74 young fledged. Across the UK, 431 pairs were found.

Red Kites habitually decorate their nests, and a number of unusual items were found during nest visits. These included: a white handkerchief, a black woollen hat, a patterned curtain, a woollen sock with a hole in the toe, a detachable hood from an anorak, a hand towel, a Carlsberg lager bar-cloth and a black plastic Labrador dog! An active nest of House Sparrow was found in the foundations of one kite nest.

Remains of food items found in the nests were primarily Rabbits (often the staple diet), but also a Brown Hare, lamb's tails (complete with docking rings), a couple of Hedgehogs, Feral Pigeons, Hooded Crows, Red Deer carrion, a young Common Starling and thrush sp., the wing of a female Common Pheasant, many Brown Rats, a male Eurasian Sparrowhawk, an adult Common Shelduck and the front leg of a sheep. Three Red Kite chicks died in 2000 as a result of ingesting rats poisoned with second generation anticoagulant rodenticides.

Away from the core area, one bird (Blue/pink '5'), tagged on the Black Isle on 22 June 2000, and seen at a communal roost there in November, subsequently took a trip to Devon, where it was seen on 28 January 2001. Apparently unimpressed with

England, it travelled the 735 km back to the Black Isle in two days! Allowing for eight daylight hours of flying each day, a direct path over the Bristol Channel, West Wales, 170 km crossing of the Irish Sea to Dumfries and Galloway and onward to the Black Isle, represents an average speed of 46 km/hour.

Most SOC members will have heard of the male Red Kite that was tagged as a chick in 1997, subsequently wandering to the south coast of Iceland, where it survived primarily on scraps put out by farmers until it was picked up, disabled by fulmar oil, in September 1999. It was taken into care and released back onto the Black Isle on 1 March 2000. Sadly, he was found dead 7 weeks later, 40 km away. It has not been possible to determine the cause of death.

More information about Red Kites can be found in the ***Red Kite North Scotland Newsletter 2000*** **(RSPB/SNH).**

Golden Eagle nest plundered

It has been confirmed that a Golden Eagle nest in the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park, Balquiddar, has been plundered by egg collectors and all the eggs stolen. Officers from Forest Enterprise and Central Scotland Police abseiled down to the nest to check on the suspicion of the crime.

This is the third time since 1995 that this nest has been hit by wildlife criminals. One of the eaglets from '95 was found starved to death in a crow trap in 1996, and one of the Class of '99 was discovered poisoned on a Perthshire moor in 2000.

Commenting on the theft in relation to the Foot and Mouth outbreak, John Markland, Chairman of SNH, said: *'This theft shows the contempt that wildlife criminals have for our wildlife and for our farmers. The public has shown a responsible attitude to staying away from the countryside but these criminals don't care about the risk of spreading Foot and Mouth disease and they don't care about destroying threatened species for their own petty gain.'*

Golden Eagle at nest *Dennis Johnson*

Western Capercaillie viewing project

Between 2 April and 21 May, over 1500 people visited the RSPB Centre at Loch Garten for the early morning views of Western Capercaillie lekking. With the population now estimated to be about 800 birds (down from 20,000 in the seventies), the Capercaillie Viewing Project serves not only to show an increasingly rare spectacle to a wider public, but also to take some of the pressure off other leks. The birds were seen on 47 out of 52 mornings (unfortunately not on Good Friday when 70 people turned up!). On the days when Capercaillie did not perform, live pictures and sound were relayed to the Centre from CCTV cameras on site.

The mysterious Musselburgh shearwater

As reported in *Ibis* 143: 172, the BOURC has, for the moment, closed its file on this bird. A Little Shearwater was found dead 100-150 m south of the sea wall at Musselburgh on 9 December 1990 (specimen now in the NMS Royal Scottish Museum). The record was originally accepted by the BBRC as a bird of the race *baroli* (*Brit. Birds* 84: 452), which occurs on the small islands off Madeira, Selvagens, Canaries and Azores (*BWP*). In 1995 a request was received by the BOURC for its reassessment as the first Northern Hemisphere occurrence of the south Atlantic race *elegans* (Tristan de Cunha and Gough Island). The specimen was examined by Peter Hayman and, whilst resembling *elegans* in appearance, there appears to be an inconsistency in the structure of its tail. Furthermore, an analysis of its mitochondrial DNA by Dr Jeremy Austin places it among the *baroli* race and not with *elegans*. Further investigations are likely to take place, and the results are eagerly awaited.

Old Scottish Buffleheads

When the BOU was alerted to the fact that there were 2 extant specimens of the 'first' British Bufflehead in different museums, it launched a re-examination of all pre-1958 records, and most of them were found to be unacceptable. Records relating to Scottish birds were put to the sword as follows:

Orkney Islands, autumn 1841
Obtained by Stephen Mummery, whose honesty has been questioned. The fate of the specimen is unknown and Gurney discovered that the bird was collected outside Europe. The record is therefore not acceptable.

Loch of Strathbeg, Aberdeenshire, 'many years ago'
Although the specimen was seen by Gray, a reputable author and naturalist, there is no description and few details are available: not acceptable.

Loirston Loch, Aberdeen, January 1865
Again the specimen was seen by Gray, who called it 'a beautiful male'. It was square-bracketed subsequently, with little justification, but as no further details are available the record is not acceptable.

Eriskay, South Uist, June 1870
Part of the Mackay collection of adult male ducks, all said to be collected in May-August and mostly in plumages or stages of moult that are incongruous for the time of year. All these ducks are suspect and the Bufflehead is not acceptable.

Shetland Islands, 25 November 1912
It was sold by the Cheltenham taxidermist, Clark, to the credulous collector Sir Vauncey Harper who was notorious for buying rare specimens without checking their authenticity. This pair were also involved in the history of the unacceptable Ruby-crowned Kinglet from Gloucester, and the Bufflehead is tarred with the same brush: not acceptable.

Orkney Islands, December 1918
There appears to be no surviving evidence to support this claim: not acceptable.

The first (and only) acceptable Scottish record appears, therefore, to be the male from West Loch Bee, South Uist, 14-18 March 1980. Buffleheads were still scarce in collections in 1980, and the location, weather and time of year were all consistent with expected patterns of natural vagrancy.

The number of Buffleheads in captivity in Europe has rocketed in the last 20 years, such that it is likely that any Bufflehead seen in the wild is an escapee. BBRC has, however, accepted 4 subsequent records from England.

For full details of all these birds, see the article by Alan Knox in the February issue of *British Birds* (*Brit. Birds* 94: 61-73).

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The use of English names for British birds within the SOC

The SOC is aware that the question of which English names should be used for British birds is an emotive issue for some birdwatchers. The SOC has received both support for and objection to its decision to use the BOURC English names in the *Scottish List* and central publications, and Council recognises that for a few objectors (and supporters) this matter is of acute concern. After lengthy discussion and reconsideration, the Scottish Birds Records Committee and Editorial Committee proposed the following policy, which has been approved by Council.

It is considered essential that the 'official' *Scottish List* should conform in **all** respects with the British Ornithologists' Union's *British List*. This includes the sequence, scientific names, taxonomy, rarity decisions and English names. Previously, the lists conformed in all but the latter.

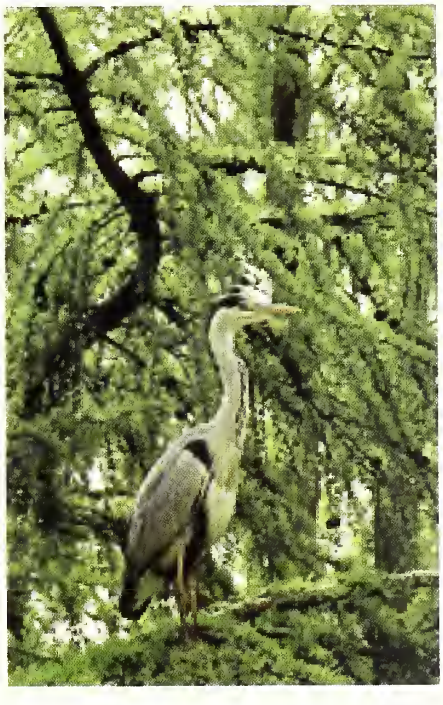
As a citable, international reference journal, *Scottish Birds* will follow the BOURC's *British List* in all respects. A similar argument applies to the *Scottish Bird Report*, with the exception that the 'old' (Forrester 1994) English names will be used in conjunction with the new names in that publication for at least the next three years. For consistency and because scientific names are not used, *Scottish Bird News* will also use the BOURC names, but it is agreed that as an informal Club newsletter this should be flexible, and that the Editor will, wherever possible, retain authors' chosen English names if this is specifically requested in articles and letters. This also applies to the Club's web site.

The choice of English names used in local bird reports rests ultimately with the individual editors. It had been hoped to discuss this matter at the Recorders' Meeting on 1 April 2001, but this has been postponed due to the Foot and Mouth outbreak. Meantime, the SOC would like to suggest that editors of SOC-affiliated reports at least consider the use of BOURC English names (in conjunction with 1994 *Scottish List* names, if preferred). To conform as much as possible with the *Scottish Bird Report*, the SOC suggests, as a minimum, that editors follow the BOURC list in all other respects.

The following principles underlie the new English names (based on an article in *Concise BWP* 1998):

1. Avoiding changing well-established names wherever possible;
2. Where the English name for a species is different in two or more regions of the world, precedence is given to the name used in the region where it primarily occurs (or breeds if it is a migrant);
3. Adding an adjective to English names such as Heron, Kingfisher, Swift, Swallow, since on the world stage these are not sufficient to identify a species;
4. Matching 'comparative' names such that there is not a White-fronted Goose and a Lesser White-fronted Goose, but a Greater and a Lesser White-fronted Goose;
5. Replacing names where an inferred relationship is misleading e.g. Honey Buzzard is not a *Buteo* buzzard, and Stone Curlew is not a curlew;
6. In a few cases it has been necessary to opt for the name used on one side of the Atlantic or the other (Beaman 1994 recommends changing diver to loon, skua to jaeger and guillemot to murre, but this is not the case in the BOURC list).

It must be stressed that informally people will always use the names they prefer to use – whether it be Dabchick, Tystie, Bonxie, RBFly or SpotShank or whether *Carpodacus erythrinus* is Scarlet Grosbeak, Scarlet Rosefinch or Common Rosefinch. There has been a long history of name changes in British birds, all probably equally unpopular at the time, but which are now accepted without thinking. Back in the 1980s, Heron was changed to Grey Heron and Partridge to Grey Partridge. Most of us are now totally at ease with calling the bird a 'Heron' and reading about 'Grey Heron' in publications. There are some name changes that are less easy to adapt to, notably those which follow North American usage (e.g. Mew Gull, Horned Lark), but these are generally less extensive than in alternative lists, such as Beaman (1994)



Grey Heron *Fred Wescott*

Grey Heron, one of the least difficult of the name changes to come to terms with in recent times

It is often pointed out that the most unambiguous species name is its scientific name, but a general reluctance to use them amongst English-speaking birdwatchers has led to an over reliance on English names, and this has come to a head with the recent increase in foreign travel. In any case, even scientific names are not cast in stone – it is perhaps ironic that in the nine years since its list was first published, BOURC have changed many more scientific names than English names (excluding lumps and splits).

Some would argue that birdwatchers have been slow to accept the BOURC names. But this is not a reason for the SOC not to change. It is true that many magazines and newsletters still use the shorter and more familiar old names, but there is an increasing trend for scientific journals, European publications and now even books (e.g. the new *Collins Bird Guide*) to use BOURC (1992), Beaman (1994) or *British Birds* (1997) English names. Significantly, the BTO have recently adopted a similar policy to ours, and a growing number of regional English bird clubs (and Scottish local bird reports) now use the new names (alone or in conjunction with the old names). Some magazines and societies have their own sets of English names and others are inconsistent. It is considered unnecessary and undesirable for SOC to maintain a unilateral list of Scottish birds, picking and choosing from other published lists. Thus, the decision was taken to follow the most widely available, regularly updated list maintained by Britain's most senior ornithological society.

References

Beaman, M. (1994) *Palearctic Birds: a Checklist of the Birds of Europe, North Africa and Asia*. Harrier Publications.

Forrester, R.W. (1994) Scottish List. *Scottish Birds* 17: 146-159.

Brian Downing (President)
Ian J. Andrews (Vice President)
Malcolm Ogilvie (Chairman, Editorial Committee)
David Clugston (Chairman, SBRC)

LETTERS

As a member of the SOC since 1978 I feel disenfranchised regarding the option of the BOU English names. I would have expected there to be more discussion within the club over such a radical change. If the dubious explanation given in *SBN* 60 was enough to convince the SBRC *unanimously* to adopt these new names, what was the quality of the debate which took place?

It is hardly democratic to present us with this as a *fait accompli*, when it would have been a simple matter to introduce the question and consult the membership. We could have been presented with all sides of the argument and given the opportunity to vote. Discussion at Branch Meetings should have been encouraged, but more importantly this should have been done through *SBN* or a separate mailing of a consultation paper, as not all members attend Branches.

Since when did it become within the sole remit of SBRC to effect such a change? The Club consists of 2250 members, whose subscriptions pay for the production of the publications. It now appears that seven members have presumed the authority to make these changes on behalf of the rest of us with no consultation whatsoever. The members of the Club, who are the Club, should not be excluded from decisions of this magnitude.

I understand that my own Branch (Clyde) has asked Council to reconsider the issue, and to open up the discussion amongst the membership as a whole. Meanwhile, I would ask that *SBN* reverts to using the names that are familiar to Scottish ornithologists. The new names are confusing and if kept would cause confusion for the forseeable future. For proof of this we need look no further than SBN 61, which contains a number of examples, e.g. references to 'Swifts 'on page 14, but most spectacularly of all, five records of wintering 'Little Bitterns' in Recent Reports! The new membership leaflet retains the traditional Corncrake rather than Corn Crake, but on the cover appears to have a new species - the 'Eurarian Dotterel'!

Alan Wood

Bohemian Waxwing *Neil Cook*

Bohemian Sapsucker

After a recent heavy snowfall I received information on the feeding place of Bohemian Waxwings in Ballater. I drove round the village and came on a group of seven or eight of the waxwings feeding on a cotoneaster hedge and taking turns to visit a tree by the roadside. I parked right under the tree without alarming the birds and took a few photos with a 500 mm lens. Initially I thought this was a Rowan, as I could see stalks where fruit had been, and I presumed the birds were getting an odd shrivelled Rowan berry. When the transparencies came back from the processor they proved the tree was in fact an *Acer* (one of the Maples) and that the birds were actually feeding on the sap where the tree had been damaged by snow. The ingenuity of these birds is quite remarkable.

Neil Cook

Bird Names

So the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC), on our behalf, has decided unanimously to adopt the names on the BOU *British List* for the *Scottish List* (*SBN* 60:4-5). They say that 'there has been considerable debate in recent years concerning the use of English names'. Their decision to change the names 'has not been taken lightly', yet for reasons which have not been adequately explained, they did not seek the opinions of Local Recorders, Bird Report Editors, Branch Committees or SOC members. To be fair to the SBRC, they do say that Local Bird Reports are free to use whatever names they want. However, considerable pressure is being put upon Local Recorders to change to the new names.

Despite the whole purpose of the name changes being to *avoid* semantic confusion, the BOU changes have confused the situation even more. Take a look at Ringed Plover and Little Ringed Plover. The *British Birds* 1993 list decided to call the former species 'Great Ringed Plover' to conform with 'Little Ringed Plover'. The BOU subsequently decided to convert to Ringed Plover and 'Little Plover', which does not reinforce any 'group' relationship between the two species, as to most people the term 'plover' is a wider generic rather than a group name.

The SBRC summarises what it considers to be the advantages of following the BOU in the use of English names. First, that unambiguous English names are important in national checklists. To a large extent, I agree. However it is not necessary to make 117 changes to the Scottish List to achieve this. We don't need to refer to 'Eurasian' Oystercatcher, because no other species of oystercatcher has been recorded in Scotland. It could make sense, though, to refer to our Wigeon as 'Eurasian Wigeon' because of the greatly increasing frequency of American Wigeon.

Other changes could be made if they are reasonable and popular. The name 'Rock Ptarmigan', for example, may be to some people a rather evocative name. Unfortunately however, this change is being made to accommodate calling the Red Grouse the 'Willow Ptarmigan'. If someone tells us in future that they have seen a Ptarmigan, are we going to say "which type of ptarmigan?"

The BOU has also strayed from its descriptive principle in this instance, because there is no association between Scottish Red Grouse and Willow. If it *had* to be redefined as a ptarmigan, the name 'Heath Ptarmigan' would have been more appropriate as the species throughout the Western Palearctic is associated with dwarf shrub heath habitats, whether that be willow/heather communities in Scandinavia or principally heather in Scotland.

The members of SBRC are completely missing the point. Most if not all bird names have changed through time, in the natural way that language evolves. The confusion already being caused by adopting a set of names which are radically different from nearly all published material up till now, is and will be far greater than any future confusion the changes are intended to remove. In Australia, controversy was aroused by a similar heavy-handed approach by the ornithological establishment. Their solution was to institute a plebiscite of Australian birdwatchers and ornithologists, which resulted in a number of popularly agreed changes to common names, including the welcome restoration of some traditional names.

To quote from the journal of the Australian Ornithologists' Union: '*The long-term stability of common names is a matter of extreme importance, both culturally and in terms of conservation. The interested public needs a feeling of comfortable first-name familiarity with the nation's wildlife. Passed down through generations, that familiarity has become an essential part of Australian cultural heritage for many.*' This applies equally to Scotland.

Iain Gibson
Clyde Recorder

REQUESTS

Sightings of Common Bullfinches

As part of an ongoing survey to determine the status and distribution of Common Bullfinches in Clackmannanshire, I would be grateful for all sightings and breeding records. If possible, the following information should be provided: sex/age (where known), location, grid reference and habitat type. All data, however incomplete, should be sent to: **Andre Thiel, c/o CARSE, Smith Museum, Dumbarton Road, Stirling FK8 2RQ (Tel: 01786 446008) or email: athiel@swt.org.uk**

Common Bullfinch *Duncan McDougall*

Willow Tits

Please report any sightings of Willow Tits in Lanarkshire, especially those with colour-ring combinations (see article in this issue of *SBN*). Please send all details, including date and location of bird(s) to: **Jimmy Maxwell, 7 Lilac Hill, Hamilton, Lanarkshire, ML3 7HG Tel: 01698 426476.** All records will be gratefully received.

Colour-ringed European Goldfinches

During the past two winters, several large flocks of European Goldfinch (Goldfinch) have been recorded on farmland around Aberdeen, Northeast Scotland. These have been associated with rape stubble and unharvested fields of linseed. Unharvested linseed appears to be particularly attractive to the Goldfinches. Very impressive flocks of up to 800 in January 2000 and two of over 1000 birds in January 2001 were unprecedented and well in excess of previous highest counts for this area. Over 1000 birds were ringed by Grampian Ringing Group last winter in an attempt to determine the origins and breeding distribution of these flocks. Initial findings, through the large numbers of ringed birds recaught and lack of ringed birds from elsewhere, suggested flocks were almost entirely discrete, sedentary and of local origin. However, deep snow during February 2001 resulted in eight inland to coastal movements of 18-24 km and the almost complete disappearance of two flocks totalling well over 1000 birds. We shall be checking as many Goldfinches as we can for colour rings during the summer and would be grateful if other observers could do likewise. They have been colour-ringed on the left leg with one or two colours (depending on site) and metal-ringed on the right leg. Please look out for colour-ringed Goldfinches in your area and note colour(s) of rings, location and date. All sightings will be gratefully received and acknowledged with as full a history as possible. Please send sightings to: **Ian Rendall, 30 Cherry Road, Aberdeen AB16 5EP. Email: ian@hirundine.fsnet.co.uk**

European Goldfinches again

Many of you will have noticed that European Goldfinches (plain old 'Goldfinches' in old money) have taken to visiting gardens and eating peanuts, as well as other garden goodies. I am trying to collate data on the origins and spread of this behaviour. European Greenfinches in the sixties and seventies, followed by Eurasian Siskins in the eighties, 'learnt' about garden peanuts and are now common visitors to gardens. It seems like the mid-late nineties saw European Goldfinches also catch on to this new-fangled food.

So, if you get Goldfinches on your garden feeders (even rarely), please send in as much data as you can on these birds. Things to note are: what they eat (peanuts or other foods), what year they started to arrive, what time of year do you seen them most, and approximate numbers. Very importantly, please remember to tell me where your garden is. All contributions will be acknowledged and everyone who sends data will get a copy of the collated report as it is completed.

Martin Collinson, 22 Tippet Knowes Park, Winchburgh EH52 6UJ.
Email: Martin.Collinson@care4free.net

European Goldfinch *D Mitchell*

Gardeners wanted

If anyone is feeling green-fingered and can get to Regent Terrace during the week... would you mind volunteering to help tidy the garden? You may be able to spot the foxes that hang out there – as shown in this painting of them by D. Robertson.

The SOC garden foxes *Derek Robertson*

SOC NOTICES

Nominations for Council

Nominations are invited for two new Council members to replace members retiring in October and also the posts of Vice President, Honorary Treasurer and HOnorary Secretary (a new post, essentially a club/committee secretary, and not a replacement for the paid Secretary's post, whose job title and remit is being revised). ominations should be made in writing with a proposer and seconder and should be sent to the President, SOC, 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh EH7 5BT no later than 31 July 2001.

Annual Conference 2001

This year's Annual Conference will be held at the Balavil Sport Hotel, Newtonmore, over the weekend 26-28 October. The main theme will be *'Our birds overseas'*, but talks of a more general international theme will also be included. The full programme and booking form will be sent out with the September mailing.

Photographic Competition

Entries for this year's competition should be sent to 21 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, EH7 5BT no later than 1 October 2001. Subjects must be live wild birds photographed in Scotland and with the appropriate licences as required. They should be clearly marked with the photographer's name, the species and locality. All entries will be returned as soon as possible after the Conference.

2001/2002 Winter Programme

Dates for the September meetings of Branches are as follows: Ayrshire - 19 Sept, Borders - 10 Sept, Caithness - 19 Sept, Clyde - 10 Sept, Fife - 12 Sept, Grampian - 10 Sept, Highland - 11 Sept, Lothian - 18 Sept, Stewartry - 20 Sept, Stirling - 13 Sept.

'Avifaunas of Scotland' Project

Several letters of support have been received but unfortunately the proposal is little further forward. It had been hoped to fully discuss this proposal at the Recorders' Meeting that should have been held on 1 April. However, this was postponed until the autumn due to the foot-and-mouth outbreak. Meanwhile, it would be helpful if Branches could discuss the *Avifaunas* proposal in advance of a rescheduled Recorders' Meeting. I thank all those who have already offered help.

Ian Andrews

Sylvia Starts her new Job

As you are probably all aware, Sylvia Laing, the stalwart of our headquarters in Regent Terrace, has moved on to pastures green. Sylvia, who joined the staff of SOC in 1989 as Membership Secretary, took over from Michael Murphy, some ten years ago, as Club Secretary. In that rôle she was responsible for the day-to-day running of the Club. Indeed, to outside organisations and individuals and much of the membership, Sylvia was the SOC. Over the years she adapted to new skills and technologies and the production of many of the Club publications and the development of the winters' programme of speakers she took in her stride.

She will, of course, be remembered for her organisation of the many successful Annual Conferences and will undoubtedly be sorely missed at these events. Her outgoing and welcoming personality helped things go with a swing.

All the years Sylvia worked with the SOC she made the daily journey in from her home near Perth. Over the years she has seen the journey get frustratingly longer. The time to get to and from work, on occasions up to five hours, was central in her decision to seek employment closer to home. I'm sure you would want to join with me in wishing Sylvia every success with her new employers, Norwich Union in Perth.

While there was an informal presentation on Sylvia's last day at Regent Terrace, it has been agreed that she should be our guest at this year's Conference in Newtonmore. There will be a formal presentation as a mark of our appreciation all the good work she has done over the years. I would add that this good work and support seems set to continue. Sylvia has recently agreed to serve on the committee of the Central Scotland (formerly Stirling) Branch. We wish her well.

Brian Downing
SOC President

Scottish Birds Records Committee

Election of New Member

One member of SBRC retires annually by rotation, and this year it is David Clugston's turn to stand down. Nominations to fill the vacancy are invited and should be submitted to Ron Forrester (address below) by 31 August, signed by a proposer and a seconder, who must both be SOC members. If there is more than one nomination, a postal ballot shall take place in which all SOC Local Recorders will have one vote. In order to ensure there is a replacement, SBRC have always put forward a nomination and this year our candidate is Richard Schofield, who will be well known to many of you. Although living for the last 25 years in Aberdeen, he has studied seabirds on Shetland and St Kilda and worked on upland birds for the RSPB. Richard has lead birdwatching tours to all seven continents, with South America being a particular favourite. He has also served on the North-east Scotland Records Committee for most of the last 20 years. We encourage additional nominations.

Ron Forrester, Secretary, SBRC, The Gables, Eastlands Road, Rothesay, Isle of Bute PA20 9JZ.

Changes to Recording Network

Outer Hebrides

Brian Rabbitts is standing down as recorder for the Outer Hebrides. Andrew Stevenson is to take over. His contact details are as follows: **Mill House, Snishival, Isle of South Uist HS8 5SG.** Tel: 01870 620 317. Email: andrew.stevenson@SNH.gov.uk

Caithness

Peter Miller is standing down as recorder for Caithness, Stan Laybourne is to take over. His contact details are: **Old Schoolhouse, Harpsdale, Halkirk, Caithness KW12 6UN.**

200 Club

Winners in the fourth quarter of 2000 and the first quarter of 2001 were:
October 1st £30 - B. S. Turner, Thornhill; 2nd £20 - Dr A. M. Insh, Hamilton; 3rd £10 - R. M. Sellers, Cumbria.
November 1st £150 - Mrs F. Hewlett, Tarbrax; 2nd £75 - R. G. Allan, Isle of Seil; 3rd £50 - Mrs E. M. Smith, Edinburgh; 4th £30 - Miss D. C. Matchett, Edinburgh; 5th £20 - B. Etheridge, Avoch; 6th £10 - A. Anderson, Newburgh (Aberdeen).
December 1st £50 - Dr A. R. Jennings, Oban; 2nd £30 - A. Anderson, Newburgh; 3rd £20 - R. T. Smith, Lockerbie; 4th £10 - Miss S. R. Goode, Edinburgh.
January 1st £30 - Dr I. R. Poxton, Edinburgh; 2nd £20 - D. Macdonald, Dornoch; 3rd £10 - F. D. Hamilton, Longniddry.
February 1st £30 - Mrs M. Lennox, Melrose; 2nd £25 - T. W. Dougall, Edinburgh; 3rd £20 - D. Macdonald, Dornoch; 4th £10 - T. C. Johnson-Ferguson, Canonbie.
March 1st £60 - A. D. Johnson, Braco; 2nd £30 - Mrs E. A. Munro, Edinburgh; 3rd £20 - Miss M. M. Spires, Peterborough; 4th 310 - H. Robb, Stirling.

June brings the start of the 200 Club's 13th year. In the first 12 it raised over £12,000 for the SOC with the same sum being returned to its members in monthly prizes. They are all very warmly thanked for their support. We have maintained over 200

members for the past three years but, while the vast majority have continued this year, there are a few spaces still to be filled to keep the number up to 200. If you would like to join now for the rest of the 'year' to May 2002, please contact me.
Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH (01896 822176).

Apology

Sorry for the sudden appearance of wintering Little Bitterns in *SBN* 61 instead of the more usual Great Bitterns or (more confusingly) just Bitterns. I take full responsibility for this and apologise to readers and to Angus - Ed.

Bird Books
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Isle Of May Bird Observatory

The Isle Of May is Scotland's oldest bird observatory. Founded in 1934, it lies just five miles off the Fife coast. In the spring and autumn, the main work of the observatory is recording bird migration, including rare and unusual species, some of which are new to Britain. Last year's highlights included Spotted Crake, Yellow-browed Warbler, Icterine Warbler, Bluethroat, Horned Lark and Red-backed Shrike as well as Balearic Shearwater, Leach's Storm-petrel and Northern Goshawk. Ringing activity included catching over 400 Chaffinch, 250 Eurasian Siskin and 500 thrushes as well as the observatory's first Eurasian Dotterel. Bookings are still available for the migration periods in spring and autumn as well as the breeding season when the island is teeming with seabirds. A stay at this historic observatory is a unique experience. Any keen naturalist may stay at the observatory and active bird-ringers are especially welcome. Enquiries to **Mike Martin, 2 Manse Park, Uphall, West Lothian. EH52 6NX or tel: 01506 855285.**

Insh Marshes newsletter

RSPB Scotland's annual community newsletter for Insh Marshes is now out. Free copies are available from the Reserve Office (tel: 01540 661518) or the RSPB North Scotland Regional Office (tel 01463 715000; email nsro@nsro.rspb.org.uk).

Colour slides and prints wanted

SBN is desperately short of colour pictures of birds. If you have any decent prints or slides that you would like to see in *SBN*, please send them in. We can scan them onto a file and return the originals. A healthy catalogue of material will free up time here in the office and enable publications to be produced in a more timely and stress-free manner.

Apologies also to Dennis Johnson for the poor reproduction of his superb photograph of Black Grouse in *SBN* 60. We promise to do better with any contributions, and print one of Dennis' photographs below.

Black Grouse at lek *A D Johnson*

REVIEWS

Threatened Birds of the World *by BirdLife International. Lynx Edicions and BirdLife International (Barcelona and Cambridge, UK) 2000. 852 pp, numerous colour plates, illustrations, maps and figures. Price £70.00. Available from Lynx Edicions, Passeig de Gràcia 12, Barcelona, Spain. (Order on-line at* ***www.hbw.com*** *or specialist natural-history booksellers).*

This is an important book whose title tells you all you need to know about its contents. It is also a big book (not least its weight: 4.6 kg), whose size reflects the magnitude of both input and content. Nearly one thousand people contributed information or expertise, and the work of almost one hundred artists illustrates its pages.

The book begins with sections which include the problem (essentially us), the solution (also us), documenting and assessing extinction risk, the areas where threatened birds occur (Brazil and Indonesia are top of the list with 114 species each) and the habitats most important to them (tropical forest). The causes of decline are then described (of many multiple and compounding effects, habitat loss/degradation is having most negative impact, with non-sustainable selective logging the principal threat), followed by solutions (survey the species and establish protected areas), criteria for determining the degree of threat, and a key to interpreting the species accounts which comprise the bulk of the book - almost 600 pages describing 1,186 globally-threatened species.

Each species account, from Southern Cassowary to Blue Chaffinch, contains a summary of its status, details of its range and population, ecology, threats, conservation, targets and references. A map of each species' breeding and, if different, non-breeding areas is given. An illustration of the bird sits in the corner of every account. Most of these are taken from existing publications (notably the superb Lynx Edicions *Handbook of the Birds of World*) and they transfer beautifully. Others have been specially commissioned. There are some splendid full-page portraits (many by Chris Rose) at the beginning of each section. It was a brilliant move to invite subscribers to sponsor the individual species accounts. (The Olewine family of the USA, to whom the book is dedicated, are to be especially congratulated on their generosity and commitment in this respect). Quite a few remain unsupported, however, and one wonders why - does no one love the Western Wattled Cuckoo-Shrike or Mrs Moreau s Warbler?

Concluding sections list species at Lower Risk, those for which there are too few data and, most disturbingly, Extinct Species. This last

section details the 128 species known to have vanished from the face of the earth since 1500. These include well known ones such as the Great Auk and, of course, the Dodo. But there are many other less notorious ones (what would I have given to see the "giant, flightless" St Helena Hoopoe?), some having been in existence until only a couple of decades ago (many from islands, including Guam, where an introduced tree snake has all but wiped out the endemic avifauna).

The individual accounts of globally-threatened species represent the collection, collation and synthesis of a vast amount of information. Thoroughness of research is a hallmark of BirdLife publications and the almost fifty pages of references attest to the scope and depth of this volume.

Very few people could claim to be familiar with, or even have heard of, all the birds in this book. I scrutinised the accounts of species from those areas which I know best - South Africa, Tristan da Cunha and Seychelles - and found them to be accurate and impressively up to date. They are also concise, readable and informative. Reading through these and other accounts on the way was like being on a long, depressing but enlightening and strangely compelling journey. As well as being an amazing work of reference, it's a book to make you think.

The inclusion of birds such as Lesser Kestrel, Sociable Lapwing and Red-legged Kittiwake, which have populations of thousands and/or are distributed over tens of thousands of square kilometres might seem paradoxical, not least when other species are represented by a few individuals cowering in a patch of scrub on one hillside on one remote and rat-infested island. But if such species have shown recent declines which show no signs of abating, or the factors which already have dramatically reduced their populations and range continue or increase, then it is important to be alert to their status and prepared to take action when necessary. It's amazing how quickly the rot can set in, as any Passenger Pigeon, were one alive today, would tell you.

A section giving a breakdown of threatened species by territory (country) is of interest. It is here that we discover, if we haven't already done so, that the only UK breeding birds meriting inclusion are the Corn Crake (Vulnerable), White-tailed Eagle (Near Threatened) and the "Scottish" Crossbill (Data Deficient). The only other species is the Aquatic Warbler (Vulnerable), which occurs here on passage, but is under threat on its rapidly diminishing breeding grounds.

The global statistics are sobering and this book demonstrates that not even the birds of the deepest Amazon rainforest, the most isolated oceanic island or the highest Himalayan mountainside can be considered immune from direct or indirect human threats to their existence. One-hundred-and-three bird species have become extinct since 1800 and a further 182 now find themselves on the brink of extinction. Ninety-percent of extinctions since 1800 have been on islands and 99% of globally-threatened bird species are at risk from human activities. Habitat loss and direct exploitation can, theoretically, be stopped. More insidious and damaging in the long-term is invasion by alien predators and competitors and by plants which alter the natural habitat.

I am loath to point out any faults, but I suppose the reviewer is at least obliged to look for some. A map of the world with country names would have been handy. I would have liked a plain page or two of introduction and executive summary to give a background to the book and its contents rather than launching straight into the busy, sometimes too busy, pages describing the extinction risk and opportunities for action. The instructions on how to use the book are perhaps a little intimidating for those of us who still struggle with a VCR manual.

This is probably not a book for those whose birding interests stop at the Border, or even the English Channel, but for the increasing numbers of birders who go overseas and who take a broadening view of conservation, it is essential and illuminating reading. A copy of *Threatened Birds of the World* should also be on the shelf of everyone in a position of national influence or authority, not to mention on the solid mahogany desktop of the chief executive of every logging company. We can only hope that this magnificent volume does not become a memorial to any of the birds within its pages.

Mike Fraser

The egg collectors of Great Britain and Ireland - a compilation of profiles of some 20th century egg collectors. *A.C. Cole and W.M. Trobe. Peregrine Books, Leeds. 2000. 298pp 114 black & white illustrations. ISBN 0 9536543 0 3. Available from Peregrine Books (£35 incl. p&p), 27 Hunger Hills Avenue, Harsforth, Leeds, LS18 5JB.*

The range and quality of ornithological literature produced in recent years has attained standards which are, in general, considerable improvements on material produced a generation ago. One trend has been the success of books such as *Biographies for Birdwatchers* and *The Bird Collectors* which reveal much about some of the significant figures in ornithological history.

The Egg Collectors of Great Britain & Ireland is part of this niche market. The core of the book is preceded by a few introductory pages which set out the development of egg collecting from the time of the formation of the BOU, through the heydays of the 1920s and 30s, to the current status of the Jourdain Society Collection.

The main part of the book is the alphabetically-arranged biographies of the selected 206 named egg collectors. The rationale for inclusion was "better known collectors who were members of oological organisations and who published material in journals". For a few of these, the information is scant with neither date of birth nor date of death known. More substantial biographies are given for other individuals, usually merited on the grounds that their activity was science-based (either wholly or to a significant degree) with most of their work having been written up. It is in these sections that we learn about the lives and motivation of collectors such as Edgar Chance, John H. McNeile, Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, Jock Walpole-Bond and, of course Francis Jourdain himself.

It is largely through the activities of these figures that our knowledge of breeding habits is so complete. Although it may have been useful to those researchers who study eggs to have more information on the current locations of specific collections, this book successfully informs on an aspect of ornithology which is generally somewhat neglected.

Bob McGowan

A Studio Under the Sky *by Derek Robertson, Woodlands Studios 2000. 152 pages. ISBN 0-9539324-0-0 Limited edition of 1000 copies £45 (hardback) signed by the author. £195 (Leather bound). £3.40 (UK), £5.00 (Overseas) postage per book. Cheques payable to "Woodland Studios" Freepost SCO5304, Dunfermline KY12 9BR*

A Studio under the Sky is a personal exploration of the natural world, primarily in Scotland, by a highly acclaimed artist.

Derek Robertson takes the reader by the hand and reveals to us what is the true essence of the natural world through his stunning, evocative paintings. Within this masterpiece, a collection of 70 or so paintings made over a period of 10 years, he interprets the aesthetic splendour and the remarkable natural history of Scotland, along with some examples from rather more exotic locations, with charm and precision.

The short anecdotes, which bear the stamp of someone who clearly knows his subject, accompanying many of the paintings highlight that this is a labour of love borne out of a lifetime observing the natural world.

£45 price tag means it will have a significant impact on your pocket but what a treasure to have and keep for those long dark winter days when the weather forbids us to explore the natural world of Scotland for ourselves.

Helen M Cameron

Birds in Counties: an ornithological bibliography for the counties of England, Wales, Scotland and the Isle of Man. *David K Balance. 200. Imperial College Press, London. 563pp. ISBN 1-86094-157-5. £61. Hb.*

Anyone considering writing up a county or regional avifauna, researching county bird records, or simply collecting county bird books and reports, will find this new bibliography an essential source of reference. It is a monumental piece of work which took a considerable amount of detailed research to ferret out all the references. Our own Waterston library was sued to great effect to compile much of the Scottish material.

Each county is prefaced with a map showing the boundary changes which have taken place since 1840, followed by an introduction which touches upon the main features of the landscape and its birds and the development of local ornithology. The main listing has a primary aim to include all books, pamphlets, papers and articles which contain a list of species for the entire county or a part of it up to the end of 1996. A section dealing with Journals is described in chronological order of commencement and completes the listings.

I have no hesitation in recommending this book to researchers and collectors alike and, despite its hefty price, should be in all major collections, public and university libraries.

William MacGillivray: Creatures of Air, Land and Sea. *Robert Ralph. 1999. Merrel Holberton and the Nat. Hist. Museum, London. 128 pp. 100 illust., 60 in colour. ISBN 1-85894-088-5 £29.95. Hb.*

Much has been written, particularly by this author, about the importance of this remarkable Scot who was to become such an important figure in 19th Century British ornithology. Sadly his masterwork, *'A History, of British Birds'*, never achieved the praise it deserved. Had he been able to afford and include the intended colour plates of birds I am sure this set of books would have been much more highly valued.

This book is the first fully illustrated treatment of MacGillivray's art and was published to coincide with an important exhibition of his artwork at the Natural History Museum. Many of the reproduced plates of birds and fishes are simply stunning. Considering that they were painted over 150 years ago their accuracy and quality rank them equally with those of his friend and celebrated artist James Audubon. An interesting and informative text by the recognised MacGillivray expert compliments this beautifully produced book.

David Clugston

Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 6, *Del Hoyo, Elliot and Sargatal (eds.). Lynx Edicions 2001. 589 pages, colour photographs, plates and maps. ISBN 84-87334-30X. £110 (hardback).*

This eagerly awaited volume in the *HBW* series comes with an almost apologetic Editors' introduction - self-indulgent gluttony has won! Faced with the prospect of cutting the numbers of photographs and illustrations for each family of birds, the Editors have chosen to continue their full-on assault on the World's avifauna and increase the planned number of volumes. Bad news for your bookshelves and mortgage repayments, but a promising statement of intent that this series will continue to evolve into the definitive reference work that the early blurb promised. The consequence of this approach for the current volume is we get fewer Orders and families of birds for our money (Mousebirds to Hornbills), but an absolute feast of colour - including Trogons, Kingfishers, Bee-eaters, Rollers, Hoopoe, Woodhoopoes and Hornbills. The text is authoritative and accurate, though necessarily brief for many taxa, and the coffee-table nature of the photographs is justified by the interesting biological situations summarised in the captions. The extended Foreword is a fascinating mini-treatise on avian bioacoustics by Luis Baptista and Donald Kroodsma - highly recommended. There is little here for birders who don't travel abroad, but if you have already bought the first five volumes, I suspect there is no reason to stop now.

Migration and International Conservation of Waders: research and conservation on north Asian, African and European flyways. *Hötker et al. (eds.) International Wader Study Group, c/o National Centre for Ornithology, Nunnery Place, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU. 500 pages. £35. ISSN 1354-9944*

This book is based on the proceedings of the conference on 'Migration and international conservation of waders' held in Odessa, 13-17 April 1992. There are 85 papers on various aspects of wader biology and conservation. Written for professionals, it is probably an essential for those who work on waders, but contains more information than the non-specialist will ever need to know. There are a couple of papers relating directly to Scotland, but many more relating to the countries of the former USSR. An important book, fronted by the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing, but try before you buy.

Martin Collinson

SBN RECENT REPORTS A REVIEW OF SPRING 2001.

Even with Foot and Mouth restrictions making birdwatching difficult it was still largely a disappointing spring and the feeling that 2001 is still to 'get going' persists. Let's hope for a good autumn! Perhaps the single main event of the spring was a large fall at the end of March/beginning of April brought on by gale force south-easterly winds and rain. A record showing by **Bluethroats** of the white-spotted race *cyanecula* resulted from this fall with seven seen between 30 March – 6 April, all on Shetland and Fair Isle apart from one at Cove (Aberdeenshire) on 2 April. Also amongst this fall there were perhaps 100+ **Black Redstarts** mostly on Shetland and in Aberdeenshire, very good numbers of **Common Chiffchaffs** e.g. 40 on Fair Isle and 34 on North Ronaldsay on 30 March and huge numbers of thrushes e.g. on 30 March c2500 **Common Blackbirds**, 650 **Song Thrushes** and 400+ Robins were on Fair Isle alone. Also during this period a **Firecrest** was on the Isle of May on 1-2 April with another at Loch Gelly, Fife on 27 April. The April/May totals for scarcities were by contrast very disappointing. A minimum of only 12 **Eurasian Wrynecks** was reported from 25 April, 30 Red-spotted **Bluethroats** (*svecica*) were reported from 6 May and only seven **Red-backed Shrikes** were seen in May and none in the last week when they normally peak. Six **Common Rosefinches** were reported, six **Hoopoes**, eight **European Turtle Doves**, only two **Eurasian Golden Orioles** (both on Shetland), a **Red-breasted Flycatcher** (on Shetland on 29 May), only one **Ortolan Bunting** (Isle of May on 27 May), two **Marsh Warblers** (both typically on Shetland including the earliest ever there, on Noss on 12 May), at least seven **Blue-headed Wagtails** (*Motacilla flava flava*) and three **Grey-headed Wagtails** (*M. f. thunbergi*) whilst both **Icterine Warbler** and **Greater**

Red-spotted Bluethroat, 30 of which were reported from 6 May

Sam Alexander

Short-toed Lark were conspicuous by their absence. There were, as always, rarities of course but very few twitchable ones for the rarity-starved Scottish birder. On the mainland the highlights in May included an adult **White-winged Tern** at Kilconquhar Loch (Fife) from 14-16th, a **Great Egret** at WWT Caerlaverock from 10-20th, a **Lesser Grey Shrike** reported at Borrisdale Bay (Highland) on 23rd and two male **Red-footed Falcons** at Aberlady (Lothian) briefly on 13th and by Forvie NNR (Aberdeenshire) on the 20th and 22th. The star rarity however was undoubtedly the **Eurasian Scops Owl** at Cunningsburgh (Shetland) on 14 May – the eighth for Shetland, the first since 1988 and the first to be twitchable there. Also on Shetland in May, two **Rustic Buntings** were seen, an **Arctic Redpoll** was on Fair Isle on 13-16th, with a **Great Snipe** there on 29th whilst at least three **Subalpine Warblers** were on the Northern Isles in May. Elsewhere, a **Red-throated Pipit** was on St Kilda on 17 May and a **Red-rumped Swallow** on the Isle of May on 18 May.

There was a notable spring passage of Eastern Palaearctic vagrants, presumably birds that arrived last autumn and have wintered further south in Europe: a female *atrogularis* **Dark-throated Thrush** on Fair Isle on 14 -18 April (second spring record for Scotland), two **Little Buntings** on the Outer Hebrides in May (Lewis on 2nd and South Uist on 9th), a **Yellow-browed Warbler** on Whalsay on 3-4 May (first ever spring record for Shetland), a **Richard's Pipit** at Findhorn Bay (Moray) on 8 May and an **Olive-backed Pipit** on Fair Isle on 6 May. A second summer *michahellis* **'Yellow-legged Gull'** was on Fair Isle on 22 April (one of five reported in Scotland this spring and the second Shetland record), whilst a **Corn Bunting** there in May was only the fourth there in the last twenty years and a **Black Tern** there on 30 May was only the second ever after one in 1967. Also a **Eurasian Reed Warbler** on the 28 April was the earliest ever there whilst one at Loch Spynie on 16 May was only the second record for Moray & Nairn.

Eurasian Scops Owl *Hugh Harrop*

This stunning and much appreciated bird was found by Jim Nicolson in his small plantation at Cunningsburgh, Shetland on 14 May.

Three **Yellow-billed Divers** were reported in April/May on Orkney (2) and Outer Hebrides whilst two exceptional **Great Northern Diver** concentrations were 324 at Scapa Flow (Orkney) on 18 March and 417 between Machrihanish and Ronachan Point (Argyll) on 6 May. In a good showing, 40+ **Garganey** were reported from 30 March, most of which were in May. Other wildfowl highlights included, amongst the **Surf Scoter** reports, the second for Ayrshire between Turnberry Point and Maidens on 13 April, three different **Ring-necked Ducks** on Shetland in May (the first there since 1989), a **Red-breasted Goose** at Montrose Basin on 29 March-8 April (first record for Angus) with presumably the same bird then seen in Moray on 17-19 April, two **'Lesser' Canada Geese** (one of the type *parvipes* in the Nigg Bay area (Highland) on 1-23 Apr and one of the type *taverneri* on Fair Isle from 24-26 May) and five **King Eiders** reported, though for the first time since 1985 no long-staying drake on the Ythan Estuary. There were six reports of **Eurasian Hobby** in May whilst an imm. **White-tailed Eagle** initially seen on North Ronaldsay on 3 May and which ended up on Unst (still present there into June) had a blue colour-ring and is of Norwegian origin. Only one American wader was seen this spring, a **Pectoral Sandpiper** on Unst on 21-24 May but of the scarcer waders there were very good numbers of **Wood Sandpipers** and **Curlew Sandpipers** seen in May, with 30+ of the former (mostly in Aberdeenshire and on Shetland) and 22 of the latter (including an exceptional group of six on North Uist on 27-28 May). A good passage of *islandica* **Black-tailed Godwits** in April included 142 at Balgray Reservoir on 28th – a Renfrewshire record count. On South Uist there was an adult **Bonaparte's Gull** on 7-9 May (second record for Outer Hebrides) whilst there was a good passage of **Little Gulls** in Angus on 13-20 April mainly at Rescobie Loch and Monikie Country Park peaking at 270 at Monikie on 14th. The skua passage off Aird an Runair, North Uist was largely confined to the period of 16-18 May when 261 **Long-tailed** and 112 **Pomarine Skuas** passed with 13 **Long-taileds** off North Ronaldsay on 18th also, when three passed Wats Ness (Shetland), whilst also on the 18th, the nine **Pomarine Skuas** that passed Portencross was an Ayrshire record count.

Angus Murray

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Scottish Bird News

Edited by
Martin Collinson
Assisted by
Ian Andrews, Helen Cameron and Bob Dawson

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published 4 times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Secretary at 21 Regent Terrace no later than 5 weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

The SOC

21 Regent Terrace
Edinburgh
EH7 5BT

phone 0131-556 6042
fax 0131-558 9947
e-mail mail@the-soc.org.uk
web site www.the-soc.org.uk

The Scottish Ornithologists' Club was established in 1936. Now in its 65th year, the SOC has 2250 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur bird watchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications, including our journal *Scottish Birds* and the *Scottish Bird Report* and an annual conference, and 21 Regent Terrace houses the largest library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of 14 branches organises field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the official Scottish List on behalf of the Club.

More information can be found on our web site.

passwords to access members' web pages
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